

# Freud in Russia: Return of the Repressed

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The young Russian psychoanalyst was confused. His patient, an alluring, intelligent but deeply unhappy young woman, seemed affronted when he interpreted her flood of sexual reminiscences as her fantasy of their future relationship.

"I think maybe I gave an interpretation too early, but I couldn't help it," he explained sheepishly to a group of fledgling Russian psychoanalysts around a conference table in Moscow. "She got angry and was unwilling to admit that there is any sexual component to our work."

Ten years ago, a seminar about stock Freudian concepts like resistance and transference was unthinkable in Russia. Freud's writings were banned as bourgeois ideology and read only furtively in samizdat, or bootleg, form. The few self-taught psychoanalysts who saw patients did so in fear and secrecy.

Banned by the Soviet authorities for three generations, all kinds of Western methods of psychotherapy are flourishing in Russia today, competing with the more dubious methods of folk medicine, witchcraft and psychic healing. Of all the different methods and schools -

- from Gestalt to group therapy -- that have taken root since Communism collapsed, Freudian psychoanalysis is by far the most challenging and the most controversial.

For the rediscovery of Freud and psychoanalytic therapy puts Russia squarely on a collision course with trends in the West.

In a kind of cultural role reversal, Russian therapists are shaking free of 70 years of drug-based Soviet psychiatry to explore the id and the ego just as many of their Western counterparts -- spurred by advances in biochemistry and the rise of managed care -- are turning away from such long-term talk therapies in favor of drugs like Prozac.

The widespread hopes that Russia's Freudians have for the future of psychoanalysis in some ways mirror the great expectations of their American and European counterparts 30 years ago. "For 70 years the Russian people were robbed of self-knowledge," said Sergei G. Agrachev, 44, president of the new Moscow Psychoanalytic Society.

"Psychoanalysis is one weapon with which we can restore some order to our society."

In July, President Boris N. Yeltsin signed a decree officially recognizing psychoanalysis as a legitimate psychiatric treatment. Psychoanalysis is now part of the curriculum for psychology students. It is even taught at the Military University of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, formerly known as the Lenin Military-Political Academy.

The new Health Minister, Tatyana B. Dmitriyeva, is a psychiatrist specializing in personality disorders who until recently was director of the Serbsky Institute, notorious in the 1970's as a psychiatric hospital where dissidents were incarcerated.

In an interview, Mrs. Dmitriyeva was skeptical about some colleagues' embrace of psychoanalysis, referring to it as a fad that had already faded in the West. Despite her misgivings, she arranged for two former colleagues at the Serbsky Institute to study psychoanalysis in France.

"Since in our country it was prohibited, there is a natural fascination with psychoanalysis, especially among the young," she explained with a shrug. "The country has to go through it before it develops an immunity and this method finds its proper place." With a wintry smile, she added, "And not a prominent one."

So far, no Russian psychoanalyst has completed the rigorous training required by the London-based International Psychoanalytical Association. Russian psychoanalysts like Mr. Agrachev are mostly self-taught and are not certified by Western institutes. While some are medical doctors, most are psychologists.

At least eight Russian would-be analysts are in the United States undergoing the formal training that will allow them someday to train and supervise their colleagues back home.

Mikhail Romashkevich, the head of one leading Freudian society, called the Russian Psychoanalytic Association, is undergoing what he calls "shuttle analysis" in his quest for certification.

Since no Russian is recognized abroad as a training analyst, he commutes to Prague once a month to undergo analysis. He and many others who are practicing psychoanalysts in Russia submit their cases to supervisors in the West by fax and E-mail.

Mr. Agrachev, who was trained as an electrical engineer, was one of the first Russians to go underground to undergo analysis, which he began in secrecy in 1977 and kept up for nine years with a self-taught mentor. He now sees 20 patients, 2 of whom are in deep analysis, which entails four sessions a week while lying on a couch.

The average cost of psychoanalysis in Russia is about \$20 an hour. Mr. Agrachev's fees, set according to his patients' ability to pay, range from \$8 an hour to \$65.

The deprivations of Russian life make it difficult for analysts here to live up to the exacting standards of Western psychoanalysis. By day, Mr. Agrachev's office in his small apartment is a pleasant, rather impersonal den. But at night, in violation of psychoanalytic taboo, it reverts to his bedroom, the couch turning into a fold-out bed.

The burgeoning of Freudian thought in Russia is something of a boon to the Western psychoanalytic movement. Presiding at the seminar in Moscow, Earle Baughman, a visiting American training analyst from the Baltimore-Washington Institute for Psychoanalysis, was listening, through an interpreter, to the young Russian therapist discussing his reluctant patient.

"She's a hysteric, all right," he said with a chuckle. "She broadcasts sexuality all over the place, but when the man says, 'O.K., let's talk about sex,' she says no." Smiling knowingly, he compared the Russian patient to one of Freud's most famous case studies: "This is a lot like Dora."

To Westerners, the Russian Freudian movement is sometimes reminiscent of psychoanalysis in its heyday.

"Psychoanalysis here doesn't have the revolutionary spirit it once had," said Gary Goldsmith, a Boston-based member of the American Psychoanalytic Association who travels to supervise Russian psychoanalytic trainees in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

"Part of the fun in Russia is recapturing that spirit there and being in at the beginning of a revival of analysis.

"But there is a feeling in Russia that the Soviet regime turned them into a neurotic society. I've noticed there is an idealization in Russia still, a feeling that psychoanalysis is a panacea. Our job is to help them avoid the mistakes we've made over the past 60 years."

Psychoanalysis had a rich history among the Russian intelligentsia before and immediately after the revolution of 1917. The first translation of Freud's writings was into Russian. In Vienna, some of Freud's earliest disciples and even some patients, including the "Wolf Man," were Russian.

The Bolsheviks at first embraced psychoanalysis as an antidote to bourgeois thinking. Theirs was the first government to recognize psychoanalysis officially as a science and awarded its practitioners state funds. In 1926 the Soviet Government allowed the creation of the first psychoanalytic kindergarten for neurotic children, in Moscow. Stalin's son was reportedly a pupil.

"The Russian psychoanalysts were seeking a way to make Marx and Freud compatible," said Martin Miller, a historian at Duke University who is writing a book about the psychoanalytic movement in Russia. "They wanted to create a collective psychology."

Mr. Miller noted that Freud, who wrote with some asperity about the Communist state in works like "Civilization and Its Discontents," was keenly interested in the Russian psychoanalytic movement after the revolution and corresponded with some of the leading Soviet psychoanalysts.

In 1930, Stalin put an abrupt end to the experiment with psychoanalysis, and Freud was banned from bookstores and library shelves. Until the mid-1980's, university scholars studied Freud not in the original, but through the filter of Marxist critique. Though there were some Marxist-oriented psychoanalytic centers around the Soviet Union -- the largest congress of psychoanalysts took place in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1959 -- mostly, the movement died or went underground.

When Western psychoanalysts began visiting Russia in 1991, they discovered a Freudian school steeped in the literature of the 1920's and 1930's and untainted by Freud's successors and critics.

"We hadn't read Adler or Horney or Fromm," Mr. Agrachev said. "We were like the mammoths that are discovered intact and frozen in the permafrost."

That has changed. Therapists are no longer treating patients in doorways and alleys along the Arbat pedestrian mall. There are Jungians and followers of Lacan in Russia.

Even Freudian circles are suffering the kind of rifts and rivalries that characterize Western psychoanalysis. There is a thriving psychoanalytic institute in St. Petersburg and at least three in Moscow, two of which are called the "Russian Psychoanalytic Association."

Dr. Aron I. Belkin, founder of one of those two rival schools, is famous in Russia for having published a newspaper article extolling psychoanalysis in 1988, when Freud was still officially taboo.

Trained as an endocrinologist, he has spawned his own method, combining conventional psychoanalysis with what he described as psycho-neural endocrinology.

Though he has three patients currently in analysis, Dr. Belkin said he was most interested in using psychoanalysis to explore the Russian soul. He is writing a monograph examining Khrushchev's unconscious motivation in taking Crimea from Russia and giving it to Ukraine in 1954.

Dr. Belkin said he frowned on the new generation's desire to emulate Western models. "We cannot copy the West," he said. "We are different. We need to develop a purely Russian psychoanalysis to understand ourselves."